

A BIBLE PARADOX



Reading: *Matt 16.21-26 / 2 Sam 14.25-28, 18.5-11 14-15*

Matthew 16:25

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

What do we make of this? It seems like an odd paradox! Let's deconstruct a bit. If we look at the context we can see the statement is a response to Peter, who in turn is reacting to the Lord's prediction of his own death. Peter seems to say to Jesus; "No, you should want to live and do great things." He wasn't thinking spiritually, but there was someone else involved. Behind Peter was a master manipulator; Satan. Christ quickly sees through the disguise and uncovers the culprit and his subtle temptations. Satan had tried this before, using two means; the world and the flesh. When he tried to tempt Christ, openly, he attacked on three fronts.

1. To tempt Christ to command the stones to become bread, to live for His appetites. To make His flesh His master.
2. To tempt Christ to allow Satan to make Him a king over all the world kingdoms. To live for status and power.

3. To tempt Christ to throw Himself off the temple heights and have the angels save Him. To save His own life in order to show how great He was.

So we come to our statement. The key to understanding this, is that there are *two versions* of life talked about here. One is an earthly, worldly, carnal, fleshly life. A life that if you don't lose it you'll lose your soul. The soul has a spiritual part. This is true life, not merely bodily life. Christ is, essentially, saying "Don't save a life lived for non-spiritual things, outer things, at the expense of your true being."

"For what is a man profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul."

But what do I mean by earthly, worldly, carnal, fleshly? To put it very simply, I mean non-spiritual.

Earthly- majoring on the physical carnal things of earth and time, with no regard for the spiritual or the eternal.

Worldly- the seductive world system which panders only to the flesh and its lusts.

It's best summed up in 1 John 2.16

"the lust of the flesh the lust of the eyes and the pride of life"

An earthly life. This is the life we must lose if we're to find true life. A life of value, like the woman who found the lost coin in the Lord's parable. If we live for just this earthly life, without a thought for soul, spirit or God, then this rips the heart out of humanity, reducing man to a beast. If a man tries to live for just the material, in the end, he'll find it empty, after some short-lived pleasures. Ultimately, this is the substance of the Atheist version of life. He makes sure to dress it up a bit but, in the end, the predicament of man has been stated as follows, I paraphrase; -

"Existence, life, is a lonely, dark, barren, aching void. A pitiless nothing, pointless and absurd. Man is forced to live in a hollow, meaningless, negative universe, bleak, godless and full of pain."

Lovely isn't it! Don't rush to become an Atheist because you think you'll be free. Running after the world is like seeing a great gift wrapped present, alluring, attractive and seductive, with glitter that sparkles all over it. You open layer upon layer with excitement and pleasure. Finally you open it. It's dark inside, you think you see something in the shadows. You stick your head in, then you climb in, chasing the shadows for an hour, a day, a year, a decade. In the end, you start to feel there's nothing there, but you've invested so much time in looking, you just continue in vain hope. But the box was empty all along! The worldly life promises much but delivers little to nothing for an immortal soul.

What are the hallmarks of lovers of an earthly life? They love fashion and bodily things, tattoos, excessive makeup, cosmetic surgery, dancing suggestively, lust, violence, physical prowess, bodybuilding, beauty regimes. They love feeding sensual appetites, like trying to live on sweets, or chewing gum. Excessive leisure and entertainment, which over stimulate the eyes and ears and taste and touch and desensitise them, so they need ever more and more extreme. Certain music types,

movies, parties, clubs, drugs, gluttony, certain games. Anything designed for mere excitement or thrill or experience. They run after 'bucket lists'. Not that all types of leisure are wrong, but all are wrong to excess, and in whether they occupy the highest place in the hierarchy of our heart. The worldling has nothing else. They love possessions, of course, flashy things, to show off. They love status and position and power and celebrity and fame. They want to be a king. They love pride, hubris and arrogance in human abilities that should be dedicated and used for God, but are, instead, used for personal self-aggrandisement. These things are everywhere, that's why we call it the world.

What are the hallmarks of lovers of the spiritual life? They're not concerned with the outward showing off in appearance, money or possessions. They know it's not, *what you have*, but, *who you are*, that counts.

Luke 12.23 *"The life is more than meat and the body is more than raiment."*

Instead of training their body, dressing it up and over stimulating it, they use it in God's service and feed their soul by doing their devotions, reading and listening to the preacher of the word. They realise the body is a fallen, broken thing, which fades and fails, and they don't try to hang on in vain to its youthful glory. Instead they look forward to a resurrection body, incorruptible. Instead of the Pride of life their glory is in God and his ways, walking in humility and grace.

The Christian uses some earthly things, but not to excess and not, as if, that's all there is to live for. They feed on deep truths, not shallow entertainments that never satisfy. They're interested in lots of things God created, but all to give glory to God. Remember, Christians, you make bad worldlings!

To illustrate all this from some biblical people, let's look at three sons of David. Solomon, Absalom and Jesus Christ, David's greater son.

Solomon:- Writing in ecclesiastes he sums up this earthly life as a life lived 'under the sun'. Without God or spiritual life, he says, all human things are vain and pointless. Man can never find true satisfaction. He tried many things;- Mirth or comedy, work, sensual pleasure, pursuit of knowledge, riches, power and status, but found such things lead to envy and covetousness. Ultimately, nothing is lasting and it will all be forgotten by future generations, and, in the end, count for nothing. A life lived only for such things, he found, leads to many natural and moral evils for those to do so. He concludes it is a vain thing to live like this. He counsels men to remember their Creator in the days of their youth and to fear God and keep his commandments. Solomon was one of the wisest men ever, but, amongst David's descendants, there was one wiser than he.

Absalom:- He wasn't wise at all, except worldly wise, which is fake wisdom. He is a prime example of all we've been thinking about, a carnal man. If he was around today he'd want to be a celebrity. We hear a lot about what he looked like, outwardly. And if there's a lot going on the outside of a person, there's probably not a lot going on the inside, spiritually. It says he was unblemished and good looking, beautiful even, from head to toe, almost effeminate. We hear especially about his hair, not his character, nothing impressive about that on the inside. Don't be impressed with evil men and imitate them. Absalom loved himself and wanted all earthly things, especially to be a worldly king, just like Satan had offered Christ.

David was ruddy and handsome, but did he care for such shallow and short-lived things? No, he *turned* from the old life, his concerns were of holiness, they were spiritual, the opposite of Absalom, they were inner not outer. Absalom painted the outward structure, while the inner corrupted, rusted and rotted till it was fit to collapse. In the end, it was his worldly 'crown of glory', his hair, that ensnared him and left him a prey for his enemy. Pride will go before a fall, and it will for us if we live for the same things. Our desire for the flesh will be our downfall.

The Lord Jesus Christ:- David's greater son, Jesus Christ, rejected and put behind him the temptations of Satan that had so easily consumed and overtaken Absalom, and had even touched David, who had taken back Absalom when he had previously shunned him, because Absalom had committed murder.

Note; we hear nothing in scripture of Christ's appearance, except to say, there was nothing for man to desire him. He didn't place value on earthly bodily vanities and neither does the Holy Spirit when he talks of him in the Bible. The Bible says in 1Tim 4.8;

"Bodily exercise profiteth little but godliness is profitable unto all things having promise of the life that is now and of that which is to come."

Your body is a servant, but a fleshly life will make it your master. It should be a tool to be used in the Lord's service in order to bear fruits of righteousness. Don't make it a mannequin for clothes, or like an unused tool, for example, like a power drill, you polish and clean but never plug-in and use it for the right purpose. Like a fruit tree that never bears fruit.

But Christ is more than an example. He's the reason we can die to this old life, take up a cross of self-sacrifice, mortify, die to the more base desires of the flesh and gain eternal life. His life and death were substitutionary, a vicarious offering for all who would put their trust in Him, in the future or the past. That's why he rebuked Peter for saying He shouldn't offer Himself up. It was one life for many lives, spiritual lives, not earthly. Don't try to save that, or you'll lose your soul.

Some passages to end:

Acts 27.29-32 and 44b. *"Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.*

And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,

Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.

Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off....

And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land."

Be like the Centurion casting away the lifeboat of 'self salvation', don't try to save your earthly old life, lose it and you'll gain eternal life by living for Christ.

Galatians 5:24 *"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."*

Philippians 3. 7-8 *"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,"*

Mark 10.29-31. *"And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first."*

At the very start of our reading, Christ predicted his own death, he didn't love this earthly life, as Satan had tempted. Otherwise He never would have gone to the cross, and never would have been the Saviour, taking our punishment due.

Turn your back on an empty life, lose it, then you'll find what life is all about. Start living for the living Saviour, not for dead idols and worthless, empty things. Seek and find Him, even today, and this paradox won't be a contradiction for you, but a regeneration, a conversion, a justification.